

*With the compliments  
of the Compiler.*

Abiel Smith

and

Lydia Otis



R. B. Wells

E-1. S 6616

## ABIEL SMITH AND LYDIA OTIS.

The extracts from newspaper clippings printed in the following pages form the sole knowledge that I have of my great, great, great Uncle Abiel and Aunt Lydia, and are indeed a meager source of information about these unusual persons. The older members of the family who probably had many anecdotes of the Smiths have all departed this life and carried their stories to the grave. For instance, there was a family tradition that Abiel Smith aided the first John Jacob Astor in starting in business, but there is no one able to vouch for that statement today so that we can give no credence to the story.

However, I am determined that I shall have these newspaper clippings printed so that the future generations shall have at least a little idea of the personalities of their illustrious grand uncle and aunt.

The portraits of Abiel Smith and Lydia (Otis) Smith in my possession were left me by my dear Aunts Marian Lewis and Eva Lewis Ellis of Framingham, to whom they were presented by my Grandfather, Abiel Smith Lewis. These portraits were painted by Gilbert Stuart and are listed in the *Life and Works of Gilbert Stuart* by George C. Mason, *Scribner's*, 1879.

When I was twelve years old my aunts offered me the paintings and \$5000.00 if I would change my name from Robert to Abiel Smith, but I refused their proposal. However, my aunts were gracious enough to leave the Stuarts to me so that I now have my chosen name and the portraits as well.

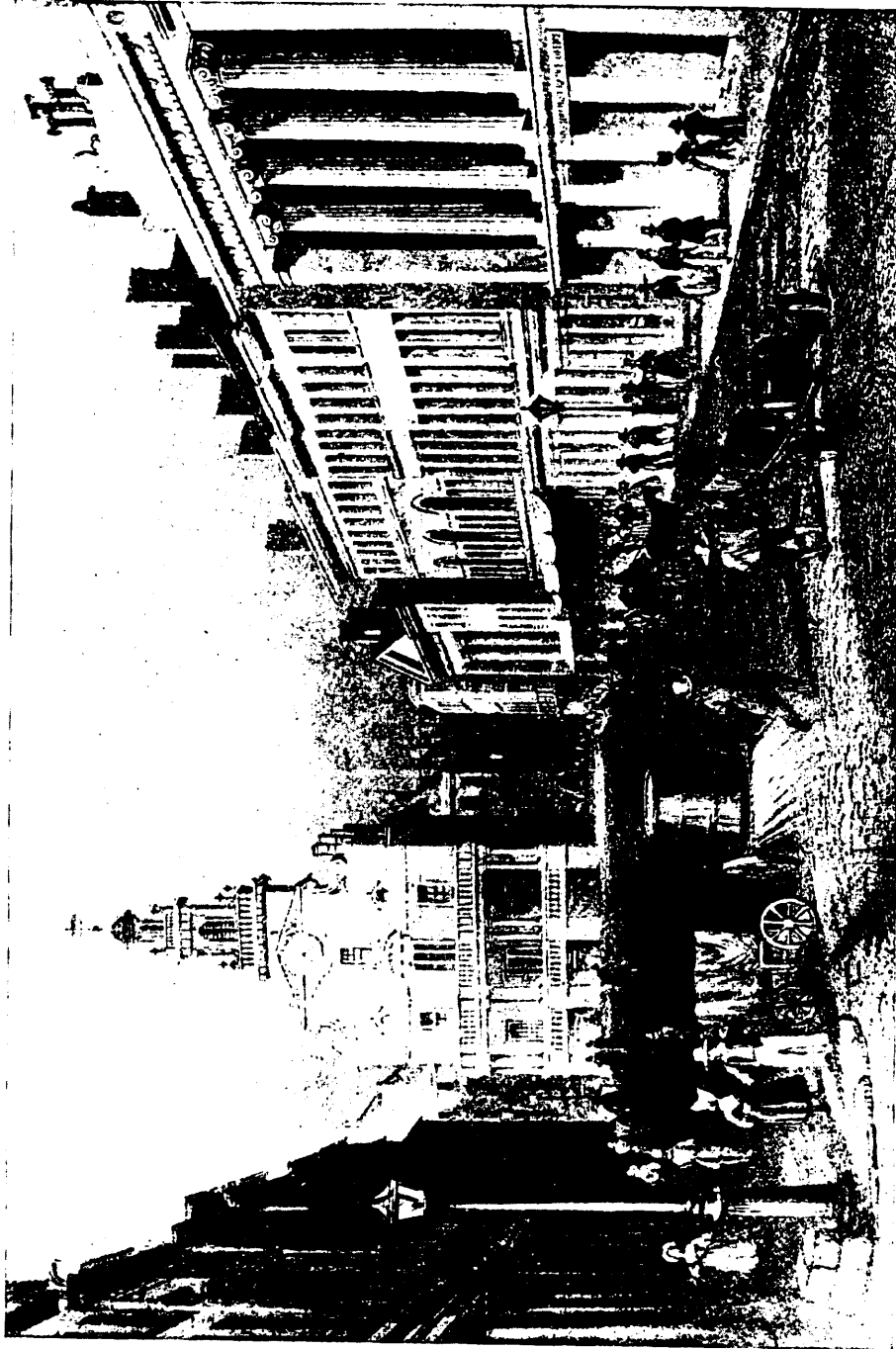
I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to George Ernest Bowman, Esq., Secretary of the Massachusetts Society of Mayflower Descendants, for his kindness in permitting me to have the Abiel Smith Will reprinted from the "Mayflower Descendant," for July, 1918.

I also wish to extend thanks to Messrs. Little, Brown & Company for allowing me to illustrate this booklet with the view of State Street, which is taken from Mary Caroline Crawford's "Old Boston Days and Ways," and published by their good selves.

ROBERT LEWIS WEIS.

The Boulders,  
Louisquisset Pike,  
Lincoln,  
Rhode Island & Providence Plantations.  
October 15, 1923.

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STATE STREET ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

*From a Correspondent to the Waltham Sentinel.*

THE CORNER OF STATE AND DEVONSHIRE STREETS  
—REMINISCENCES OF THE OLDEN TIME.

"In my reminiscences No. 5 I mentioned a gentleman named Abiel Smith, who lived on the corner of State and Devonshire streets, Boston. His house, a three-story brick one, built in the style in vogue a century and a half ago, was nevertheless considered as one of the upper class of dwellings. His sitting rooms were on the lower floor on State street. The parlor extended the length of the house over them, and was furnished in the most costly manner of those times, which at the present day would be ranked as quite inferior.

"Mr. Smith had been one of the successful merchants of Boston, but retired from business on a competence. He and his lady were somewhat eccentric in their habits and appearance. They were remarkable for their generosity and kindness. It was said that she would take persons who called at the house to solicit charity, into her rooms, inquire particularly into their wants and circumstances, give them good advice, relieve their necessities, treat them as she would her equals with refreshments, and if remonstrated with, or if exceptions were taken, would say, 'They, too, are God's children—my brothers and my sisters—worth as much in *His* sight as I am, if they behave as well as they can under the circumstances in which He has seen fit to place them. My example may help to reform them if they do wrong.'

"Mr. and Madam Smith used in fine weather frequently to ride out in an old-fashioned phaeton. It was richly furnished and drawn by an elegant span of horses, with a colored driver, and a footman behind. Madam's clothing—she always drove without a bonnet, having her hair dressed in the most fashionable style with a wreath of roses, real or artificial, round her head, and a lace veil, but seldom over her face—was of costly material, and of showy but not gawdy colors. She always carried in her hand a large and highly-ornamented fan, which served as a sun-shade. She had what might be called her faults. Who has not? She was tenacious of her good looks. Though old, she yet wished to appear young. Her face on these occasions was always said to be painted to represent the bloom of youth. She was in person fleshy, and one would suppose not over forty years of age. She was always seated on the right of her husband.

"Mr. Smith generally wore a blue coat with brass buttons, white vest, drab small-clothes, white silk hose, and shoes with large silver buckles. He wore a lace ruffle on his shirt bosom, and had his hair powdered. His hat he seldom put on until they were out of town, holding it in one hand, and in the other a large pocket handkerchief of nearly white silk. None but clergymen and ladies used cambric handkerchiefs. As they rode through the streets they attracted the attention of all who saw them.

"Mrs. Smith was a noble woman. Such an one could not but enjoy heaven *here* in the practice of humanity and deeds of charity. Who will affirm it was not doubly hers in the future? Mr. Smith, as has been stated, did more for the benefit of the colored people of Boston than any other man. His other acts of philanthropy are but little known. He no doubt observed the injunction, 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.'

"After his decease his house was converted into a place of business, and *now* every vestige of it has disappeared—even the ground it stood on has been partly taken to widen the street."

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*Extract from Note 1981 by Mrs. Frances Lewis Wilson, in the  
Boston Transcript.*

"\* \* \* \* When my grandfather, Thomas Lewis, died, about the beginning of the last war with England, there were only two carriages in that city, as I have been told, one of which belonged to Governor Hancock; and the other to Mr. Abiel Smith, who married my great aunt, Lydia Otis, a relative of our well-known patriot, James Otis."

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*Extracts from Note 1688 by "Shadows" in the Boston Transcript.*

"\* \* \* \* The third house which I have named was known as Abiel Smith's mansion. It was demolished in the forties. Many will remember the old building; it was on State street, south of the Old State House, on the corner of Devonshire street. It had a wider frontage on State street than has the granite building now occupying its site, for Devonshire street was widened by taking one-third of Smith's old building, which until then was about as old Smith left it when he died, in 1816. He was the last resident on State street. It was a three-storied brick house, painted a dingy light color; the front door was in the centre, and on each side of it were banks.

"\* \* \* \* Abiel Smith lived in the house till he died, for about fifty years. He was a thrifty, industrious man, kept his store on the lower floor and lived in the rooms above. He had married Lydia Otis of Scituate, but never had any children; his family consisted of his relations and connections in Taunton and Scituate. \* \* \* \*

"\* \* \* \* Abiel Smith was the son of Job Smith of Taunton. He was one of twelve children, six boys and six girls. His wife was one of a large family also, so there was no scarcity of brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces.

"\* \* \* \* My mother and cousin used to go to this Mr. Smith's house on every gala day. She often told me she had seen people whipped at the whipping-post, which stood a little east of the Old State House, and could be seen plainly from the parlor window. The last whipping she saw was that of a pretty woman who had a fine head of hair which she let down to cover her back for protection. This did not protect her, as the lashes cut it into her back and made the infliction worse. She said the sight made her sick. This must have been as late as 1800. It hardly seems possible that such a method of punishment was the custom less than a hundred years ago in this good and proper city of Boston. How glad we are that such things have passed away and we have no whipping-posts nor any imprisonment for debt.

"Among the incidents that Aunt Fales saw from this old house was the emeute near the head of State street, when Crispus Attucks was killed. She was there also when the battle of Bunker Hill was going on and heard the guns. She was present, and the house was full, when Washington and the procession marched past the house, and she and others aided in hanging carpets out of the windows and from the roof of the house, as all did in the neigh-

borhood in compliment to his presence. It was quite a celebration for a town of only 10,000 or 15,000 people. She said, many years after, that she had never seen anything like it.

"Mr. and Mrs. Smith were more than man and wife; they were business partners. When they were first married they were very frugal, for neither had any money, but they were determined to be thrifty, so that at dinner for vegetables they boiled two potatoes, one for each, and never wasted anything. I guess few people spent so little money for home expenses as they did, and they never were extravagant even after they had become people of property, but he always made his town and country relations very welcome and at home, as I have said, the last forty or fifty years of his life in the old house on the corner of Devonshire street (which went in old times under the tempting name of Pudding lane).

"A little before the Revolution of 1775 were trying times for the old town of Boston. The British had possession and their army was encamped on the Neck. Those were exciting times and violent speeches were made. Everybody that could left the town for safety. Some thought the British would burn the rebellious town of Boston. But Abiel Smith had a store, property and goods, and he had to stay, wondering what was best to do. His wife also was anxious to get out of town and be safe in the country, but her husband did not see how he could go; he had to stick by his property and take his chances. They had many talks, Mrs. Smith insisting on a division. There was nothing left for him to do but divide and let her look out for herself. He had goods, debts and money, so he put the gold, \$20,000.00, on one side and the debts and the merchandise on the other side, and told her to take her choice of the two sides. The goods and debts were the larger half, but the gold was easier handled. Mrs. Smith took the gold, as he thought she would, but how she would get out of the town with it or where she would hide it safely, he did not see. She, as she budged off with it, said she would manage her own affairs, and seemed more confident than her husband did.

"Hannah Barney, the same young woman who was afterward Aunt Fales, was visiting her brother Abiel. She was sitting in the parlor upstairs, when her sister Lydia entered and said, 'Hannah, we must make two petticoats and quilt a gold guinea in ever square. You must wear one and I the other.' She laid on the table a bag of gold. 'In that way we can pass through the British lines on the Neck and get into the country with all this gold.' The idea



almost took the breath out of Hannah's body, it scared her so, but there was no help for it but to keep the fact a profound secret. They went to work on the petticoats, and when done and on they were two of the most expensively dressed women of the town.

"Lydia was a strong-minded, brave woman. It took all her assumption of courage to keep Hannah up to the sticking-point, but she succeeded. They packed their trunks and started over the Neck, bound for Taunton. Hannah many times, when she was Aunt Fales, told me of the circumstances. They passed through the lines, two files of soldiers with guns pointed at them. She expected to be shot. Lydia was so embarrassed that she could not find the key to her trunk, and the inspector broke it open with his bayonet, stirred up the contents, and let them pass on. He did not of course, examine their underclothes or suspect their petticoats, and they reached safety and Taunton with the money. When it became known in Taunton, as it quickly was, it was considered a brave and lucky exploit. Both were considered heroic women and praised for their sagacity and courage, and even Uncle Abiel was overjoyed, as well he might be.

"Soon after this Washington appeared on the scene and the British evacuated Boston. Lydia returned with her 'pile of rocks,' which was an immense sum at that time. People used to wonder where Smith got so much of the 'ready' and was so flush when everybody was so dried up. He had a smart wife. Through that ready cash she made a strong financial man of him at once, and he continued to make money in the old store. He bought the three houses west of his on State street at a low price, which became very valuable in 1816, when he died, and left them to his brother Barney's three children. He left about \$300,000.00, which was a great property at that time. He was looked upon as a multi-millionaire is today.

"Abiel Smith was a money-making man, and he had considerable when the British had possession of the town, and the half he had kept in the division with his wife had grown; but the gold his wife brought back, which had passed safely through the British lines in quilted petticoats worn by the two ladies, was the factor in his great success. He appreciated it and increased the confidence he always had in his wife's sagacity. Quite a number of his descendants bear the initials A. S. in their names in memory of him."

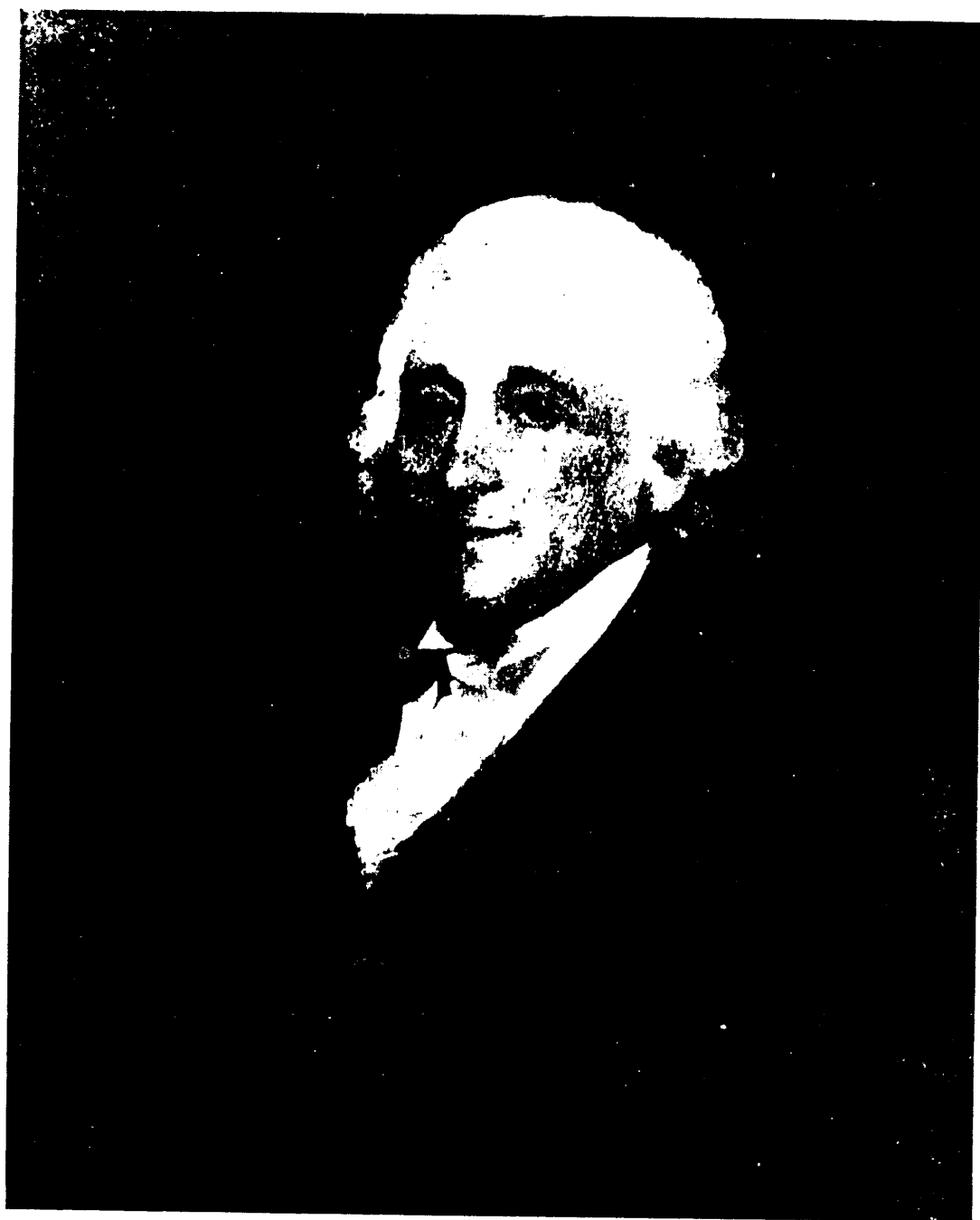
## GENEALOGY OF LYDIA OTIS.

(From the Weis-Lewis Genealogy by Frederick Lewis Weis, 1922)

- GENERAL JOHN OTIS** b. in Barnstaple, Devonshire, England, 1581. d. Weymouth, Mass., May 31, 1657. m. in England, Margaret ———. Settled in Hingham, Mass., 1635-6.
- JOHN OTIS, JR.** b. in Barnstaple, England, 1620. d. Scituate, Mass., Jan. 16, 1683. m. Mary Jacob.
- JOB OTIS** b. Scituate, Mass., 1677. d. Scituate, 1758. m. Mercy Little (1678-1755).
- EPHRAIM OTIS** b. Scituate, July 28, 1708. d. Scituate, Dec. 14, 1794. m. Sept. 9, 1733, Rachel Hersey of Hingham. (May 29, 1714-Dec. 26, 1793.) Dowry of Rachel Hersey 500 acres of land and two slaves.
- LYDIA OTIS** m. Abiel Smith of Taunton.

- PRISCILLA OTIS** (Sister of Lydia) 1742-1836 m. William Clap of Scituate, 1733-1807.
- POLLY CLAP** b. Scituate, Jan. 23, 1780. d. Framingham, Dec. 19, 1865. m. Nov. 25, 1813, Thomas Lewis, 3rd, b. 1771, d. Aug. 19, 1824.
- ABIEL SMITH LEWIS** b. Boston, July 15, 1814. d. Framingham, Mar. 2, 1895. m. (3) Dec. 6, 1865, Harriet Phipps Richardson, b. Medway, Mass., June 9, 1841, d. Long Island, Boston Harbor, July 16, 1871.
- GEORGINA LEWIS** b. Framingham, July 4, 1868. m. at Framingham, Dec. 28, 1891, John Peter Carl Weis, b. Dorchester, Feb. 20, 1866.

Robert Lewis Weis  
 Frederick Lewis Weis  
 Richard Clapp Weis  
 Marian Lewis Weis (Merriam)  
 Eva Lewis Weis (Day)  
 Francis Wilson Weis  
 Mary Blake Weis.



### *Abiel Smith's Will*

[113:559] On 6 October, 1814, "Abiel Smith of Boston. . . . Esquire" made his will. Bequests were as follows:

"In the first part I give to Doctor Ephraim Otis of Scituate" \$6000, "to be equally divided between his six children after his decease, except his son George A. Otis"

To "the heirs of Mary Lincoln of Hingham late deceased" \$4000.

To "Susannah Haliburton wife of William Haliburton Esquire of Windsor Nova Scotia" \$5000, "to be equally divided after her decease between her son William Hearsey Otis and her Daughter Abigail Fales"

"I also give said William Hearsey Otis" \$1000.

To "the heirs of Rachael Dewolf of Windsor Nova Scotia" \$4000.

To "Priscilla Clap of Scituate" \$4000, "to be divided after her decease between her son Otis Allen, and daughters Priscilla and Nancy equally."

To "Nancy Wheeler wife of Daniel G. Wheeler of Worcester" \$500.

To "Fanny Clap now living with me" \$2000.

To "the sister of my late Wife Ruth Otis" \$2000.

To "Abigail Otis sister of my late Wife the use during her life of" \$3000, "the Principal to be divided equally after her decease between her three children Joseph Charles and Abigail"

To "the children of Charles Otis deceased by his second wife" \$5000.

"I also bequeath to Samuel Fales of Boston Merchant George A. Otis of Milton Merchant and William A. Fales of Boston, Esquire, to them their survivors survivor and associates in trust for the sole use of Polly Lewis wife of Thomas Lewis of Boston Merchant" \$8000, "on the same terms and conditions as several Notes, Mortgages, and a State Bank Certificate were conveyed to said Fales Otis & Fales by an Indenture in three parts, made by and between Thomas Lewis, said Fales, Otis & Fales and said Polly, then Polly Clap, on the twenty third day of November last to wit 1813. That said Polly may at all times during her married life command and control the principal Interest or income thereof to her own Sole use and upon her own Seperate receipt therefor without hinderance of of said Thomas Lewis or any other person, as well principal security . securities . choses in action touching the the same by any last will or Testament, or writing in the nature of

## *Abiel Smith's Will*

a last Will or Testament signed in the presence of two or more witnesses as though she were sole and unmarried, and in case said Polly should die without having made a last Will and Testament or writing in nature of a last Will and Testament the trustees or associates who may then have and hold said eight thousand dollars in trust or any part or investment\* or increase thereof are hereby ordered to assign and transfer the same to the heirs at Law of said Polly or in case said Polly should become a widow by the death of said Thomas Lewis Then said trustees and associates are ordered to convey said Eight thousand dollars with every part or increase thereof to said Polly, But if my title should fail to the debt recovered in Judgment of Court against Thomas Lewis late deceased or Thomas Lewis now living, or to the Real Estate set off on Execution from them or either of them then this bequest for the benefit of said Polly is to be null and void."

"These bequests are as an acknowledgement of the Virtuous and industrious habits of my late wife and her mother and continued friendship of her relations."

"In the second part I give to my niece Hannah Cushing" \$5000.

To "each of my two Nephews William A. and Stephen Fales" \$5000.

To "the heirs of my late Brother Job Smith" \$5000.

To "the heirs of my late Brother John Wilsson, Ebenezer & Allen Smith" \$21,666.66  $\frac{2}{3}$ , "to be equally divided between those of them who shall be living or have left children at the time of my decease. I give this bequest from respect to said heirs and their connections, and not from respect to their Fathers."

To "the children of my sister Sarah Clap" \$20,000, "to be equally divided between the living and such as may have left children at the time of my death."

"I give to my Brother Barney Smith the use and improvement of my three Houses situated on the south side of State Street and south of the old State House or Town House in Boston during his life with all their appurtenances to be equally divided between his three children by my late Wifes sister Anna, after his decease in fee forever."

To "George A Otis" \$2000.

"And whereas John Marston of Quincy has been friendly towards me, and as I have Real Estate set off to me by Execution

\*"investment."

## *Abiel Smith's Will*

on Judgment of Court on Mortgages made to me by Thomas Lewis late of Boston deceased, and by Thomas Lewis & Son both in Boston and Malden subject to defeasance, Now if said Real Estate should not be redeemed to Law but be and remain my property I then give to said John Marston one house being one half meaning the southerly half of the Brick Block in Fish Street now Occupied by a Mr Brintnall and a Mr Parker with the shop in front thereof and cellar under the same, but if said Real Estate should be redeemed in behalf of said Lewis by Payment of the debt for which it was mortgaged, I then in lieu of said House give to said John Marston" \$5000, "but if my title should fail either to the debt or to the Real Estate thus set off or to any part thereof then this gift or bequest shall be null and void"

"I bequeath to the Selectmen of the Town of Boston for the time being and to their successors in that Office forever, all my thirty shares in the Newbury Port Turnpike all my twenty shares in the second Turnpike Road in New Hampshire, my seventeen and an half shares in the Kennebeck Bridge my five shares in the Bridge across from Tivertown to Rhode Island my five shares in the Springfield Bridge, my share in the Boston Theatre, my share in the Bathing House in Boston with Four thousand dollars in three per cent funded Stock of the United States in Trust for the purposes following and no other, (to wit) that they shall collect and receive the neat income thereon and appropriate and apply the whole income to the maintenance and support of a school or schools under their direction for the instruction of People of colour meaning Africans and their descendants either clear or mixed, in reading, writing and Arithmetic in such place, places & manner as said Selectmen shall deem best, and if said Selectmen shall and do accept this Donation within one year after my decease for said Purposes I then order my Executor to transfer to them all my title to said Property for the Purposes aforesaid"

"And whereas the value of Personal Property is uncertain and fluctuating I order that my Executor may Pay the bequest herein made to the heirs of my late Brother John Wilson Ebenezer and Allen Smith in the stocks of the Union Insurance Company in Boston or in the six per cent funded Stocks of the United States at par....which shall then be due or held by me"

"I give Barney Smith my Tomb."

To "James William Esquire of Taunton" \$500.

To "Peter Phelps who formerly lived with me" \$1500.

To "Hannah Wright who has lived with me" \$400.

"I also order that any gift or bequest herein made in dollars may be paid by my Executor in the three per cent funded Stock of the United States at the rate of forty percent discount on said Stock....or in the six per Cent Stock or Stocks of the United States which promises six percent Interest at Par....or in my stock in any Bank at Par."

"I give to the Harvard University at Cambridge the nominal sum of" \$20,000, "in the three per cent funded Stock of the United States as a fund the interest or income thereof to be appropriated to the maintenance and support of a Teacher or Professor of the French or French and Spanish Languages at said University either singly or in company with any other fund which may be given or appropriated to the same Purpose."

"I give to Lydia Smith, daughter of my Brother Barney Smith the nominal sum of Twenty thousand dollars in the three per cent funded Stock of the United States in compliment to her name she having been named for my late dear wife by her consent recommending it to her in case of her future Marriage to secure it to herself by the best legal advice"

"My bequest to Hannah Wright I give to her as Hannah Tailor she having married a man by the name of Tailor since I began this Instrument"

"And if my Estate should be sufficient at the time of my decease, I give to the Harvard University at Cambridge the further sum of" \$10,000, "to be used as a fund for the same purposes as prescribed in my bequest heretofore made in this instrument to said University."

"All the Residue of my Estate I give to my brother Barney Smith and I hereby appoint my Brother Barney Smith Executor to this my last Will and Testament"

The witnesses were Hubbard Oliver, Nathan Leech and William Endicott.

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The following persons have held the Abiel Smith professorship of French and Spanish Languages and Literature at Harvard University:

George Ticknor .....	1817—1835
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow....	1836—1854
James Russell Lowell	
(Emeritus after 1886).....	1855—1891
Jeremiah Denis Matthias Ford....	1907—

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